



THE BETTMANN ARCHIVE

SLAVE AUCTION IN MONTGOMERY, ALA., DURING THE LATE 1850S

**T**O BE SOLD, on board the  
Ship *Bance-Island*, on Tuesday the 6th  
of May next, at *Abley-Ferry*; a choice  
cargo of about 250 fine healthy



## NEGROES,

just arrived from the  
*Windward & Rice Coast*.



—The utmost care has  
already been taken, and  
shall be continued, to keep them free from  
the least danger of being infected with the  
**SMALL-POX**, no boat having been on  
board, and all other communication with  
people from *Charles-Town* prevented.

*Austin, Laurens, & Appleby.*

A. B. Full one Half of the above Negroes have had the  
**SMALL-POX** in their own Country.

# SLAVE TRADE IN AFRICA





# SLAVE TRADE IN AFRICA

## A Historical Perspective

by

HASAN M. RAWAT, M.A.

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# بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

## INTRODUCTION

AFRICA, the great and resurgent continent, once the land known as the historical land of King Negus or Najashi (of Abyssinia) is the main canvas of the learned author Hasan M. Rawat's absorbing book 'Slave Trade in Africa'. The principal highlights of his commendable effort bring into objective focus the misery suffered by the black people of this so-called 'dark' continent. The atrocities committed by the Europeans and the 'whites' of the American in enslaving the freedom-loving unspoilt black people of Africa particularly during the 15th to the 17th centuries through exports and since then to the first half of this century through sheer and wild colonisation of western, eastern, central and southern countries of Africa, have been fully exposed by the dexterous pen of Br Hasan M. Rawat. He himself is a resident of (Zambia) Africa for the last so many years and has had first-hand reports of the terrible and agonising experiences gone through by the forefathers of the present day inhabitants of this great continent at the hands of the selfish and perverted 'whites' during the past centuries.

Short sojourns were made however, in the earlier part of the 20th century by western authors like Gunther, Triminham and some other open-minded writers and specially by James A. Michener, for writing his thought-provoking book on (South) Africa 'The Covenant', in the 1970s. Earlier, another book called 'Roots' by another American, Alex Haley, himself a negro by origin was acclaimed as extraordinary, the world over. Alex Haley traces the roots of his own African origin from about two centuries back (approximately since 1776 — the year of American independence) when 'Kunta Kinte', a muslim and his earliest known forefather is grabbed by one of the European raiding parties, under the instigation of white colonisers to 'work' or to 'slave' on the plantation farms and corn-fields in America, years later by being bundled in the suffocating cellars of 'trading' ships. 'Roots' (alongwith 'the Covenant') is a worthwhile attempt by a non-muslim author to throw some light on the lot of the black people of Africa. Facts are facts and all honest people admit them. After reading 'The Covenant', the reader has some idea of despicable Apartheid (an unheard of expression in Islam), whereas 'Roots' shows the other side of midnight — the sufferings of the black people of Africa by the black-hearted 'whites' through machination and abusive policy based on 'principles' leading to Apartheid, which, despite all the efforts of the United Nations and peoples organisations on various levels, persists even to the present-day. In chapter XIII of 'The Covenant', author Michener states how the word apartheid was coined: "The complex fabric of old custom and new law woven (by white leaders) came to be known as apartheid . . . The word meant 'apartness' . . . It was invented and reflected their belief that God willed the races to be kept separate each progressing properly at its own speed within its own confines".

Racial discrimination is an ill-conceived practice from the pre-Islamic era of Ignorance (or 'Jahiliyah' to use an Islamic terminology).



Islam has explicitly and categorically condemned all such acts of discrimination, without any discrimination. There is no 'accursed race', according to Islamic concept. There is not a single verse in the Holy Quran implying to any 'inferior race': according to the Holy Quran all children, black, white, are born pure. Race and colour have always existed among the white people of the west and in Africa this discrimination was widely practised by them. So author Rawat has only portrayed the truth in plain and clear-cut language. What was needed to purify the 'foggy' atmosphere hanging over the much educated 'dark' Africa was a probing mind and a hand to clear away the distortions degrading Islam and the muslims and to take away the wrong twists in the history of the African people (be it the Bantus, the Fulanis or others) designed to malign the muslim (specially the Arabs) and thus subtly put the blame on the other shoulders than on whom they should belong. And this is what brother Hasan M. Rawat has attempted to do in a sane, balanced and a rational manner in this book. His commendable book is a humble but useful attempt to state the facts of undiluted history of the African people, to cast away the heaps of filth and falsehoods the west has so conveniently tried to shift from its own underhand tactics and practices, particularly with regard to slavery and slave trade, of which 'grand design' they were the culprits. Brother Rawat has stated in no uncertain terms that the 'whites' of Europe and Americas were responsible for the devious methods employed in making slaves out of the free people of Africa and the dubious manner in which this hideous trade of flesh and blood was carried out by the so-called carriers of the christian spirit', which on its own is most noble. He has quoted extensively from the well-known western writers of the past like Basil Davidson, Philip Curtin and Abu Boahen and Edward Alpers of the present era. A reader will be able to discern and judge for himself the injustice of putting the blame for slavery and Slave-trade on muslims particularly the Arabs. The Arabs had initial contact with the black people of Africa before bringing Islam to them. Islam is a peace-loving religion and it encourages social and business contacts conducive to the principles of equality and peace. Such a social and mercantile business contact was in vogue between the muslims (Arabs) and the African people much before the "Scramble for Africa" began. The Arabs were never in need of going to unusual lengths to acquire slaves which were needed by them for household work at the most and we even don't justify that for a wrong is a wrong. On the other hand, the "whites" of the west resorted to unholy tricks and coercion behind the mask of the "white man's burden" to acquire slaves through raids and actual 'human-hunts' on African coast and also by piracy on the seas traded the Africans as a 'merchandise'. Even the clergymen and the priests were involved in slave-trade, not to speak of kings and queens and trade tycoons. It was "business as usual" for them.

Br. Hasan M. Rawat's book is steeped in sincerity and has a reassuring touch of authenticity: he maintains an admirable sense of direction and is motivated by love and devotion to the cause of Truth as evidenced in various parts of the book. The Holy Prophet Mohummed (SAW) encouraged the voluntary emancipation of slaves and war captives,



by setting the best example himself. He set slaves and war captives at liberty whenever he came to possess them. His companions followed his precept with scrupulous sincerity in mundane matters and in religious affairs. Thus he prepared his Ummah, the Islamic Community, for the abolition of slavery as a righteous act and as a religious duty. That is the reason why muslims did not indulge in slave traffic or "invent" theories to justify slavery and slave trade. The interaction or contact between the muslims on one hand and the Africans on the other, had laid the foundation of Swahili civilisation on the east coast of Africa and Fulani and Hausa and Mali civilisation in West Africa, which lasted from the ninth to the seventeenth/eighteenth centuries. The Almorvides (Al-Murbitun) Berbers dominated the western kingdoms of Ghana and Mali, not because they were "Hamitic" people but because they had embraced Islam as was the case with the Arabs. They had no racial superiority; it was Islam that made the Arabs and the Berbers the torch-bearers of civilisation in Africa. The Sudanic negroes also established prosperous, progressive, peaceful and civilised societies because of the influence of Islam. Even in Europe the white people of Spain remained backward and illiterate until the advent of the muslim rule. It was Islam that made Arabs great. Likewise the Bantus of East Africa or the Housas and the Fulanis of west Africa basked in the rays of their uplifting, Afro-Islamic culture and they passed on their enlightening principles to various parts of Africa. But then came the dark period of western colonialism of the white-man's supremacy. They called it their covenant with God to discharge the white-man's burden in Africa.

The concept that the "negro is a natural slave" was developed between the 15th to the 19th century to justify African slavery and the European slave-trade. It was unjust of the Europeans to regard the Africans as 'primitive', 'without culture' and 'incapable of civilisation'. In the eyes of the west, non-western learning is not real knowledge, although it is enough to refer to Timbuctu as the great centre of Islamic learning in the medieval ages as an example. Leo Africanus reported in the 16th century that Timbuctu in Mali made a big demand for books in manuscript, imported from Al-Maghrib — northwest Africa. Most of the European historians, like Coupland and others, have adopted a deliberate practice of throwing the blame of slave trade on the Arabs and missionaries of the standard of Livingstone and Stanley. They have been guilty of distortion of historical facts by a subjective and unhistorical approach. Much of the history of Africa has been written by the Europeans to serve their colonial interests and for purely propaganda purposes, so as to boost the western culture and their concepts.

About capturing helpless people and selling them, the Holy Prophet said, "He who sells a free man by laying hands on him, I myself will be a claimant against him on the Day of Judgement". The Prophet thus forbade slave raids and/or slave trade. The Encyclopaedia Britannica tries to bring home a point when it says that the so-called slavery of Islam 'has always been very different from that which existed in Rome and in

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According to Professor S. Ade Oje of the University of Lagos, Nigeria: "There is no aspect of African national life which shows that they are propelled by patriotism. Everything we say, everything we exhibit, is dominated by three forces: abject selfishness, despicable sectionalism and nefarious allegiance to political parties — in that order". The present work is, however, different.

The encyclopaedia Britannica tries to bring home a vital point when it says that the "so-called slavery in Islam" has always been very different from that which existed in Rome and in the Americas after their colonisation by Europeans": this subject deserves a separate study. So does Br. Rawat's dissertation. Br. Hasan M. Rawat's study is steeped in sincerity and